

Stretching Exercises

Before and after doing physical activity, it is very important to stretch in order to reduce the risk of injuries, such as muscle strains. Stretching exercises also help to increase your body's flexibility. Improving your flexibility is an important part of being physically active, it improves your posture and helps to keep you physically fit.

The **FITT formula**, which stands for **F**requency, **I**ntensity, **T**ime and **T**ype, can be used for all types of stretching, and it is an excellent tool for monitoring your progress.

Frequency: Do stretching exercises after your physical activity warm-up and as part of your physical activity cool-down. Do stretching exercises most days to improve your body's flexibility.

Intensity: Always warm-up before stretching. Stretch your muscles to the point of mild tension, but not to the point of pain. Stop right away if you feel a sharp pain.

Time: Hold the stretch without bouncing for 10 to 15 seconds when you warm up and cool down. Hold the stretch without bouncing for 30 seconds or more to improve your flexibility.

Type: Use static stretches. Static stretching is the gradual lengthening of muscles and tendons as a body part moves around a joint.

Remember to always consult with your physician or health care provider before beginning any physical activity program.

When performing the following stretches, remember to resist the urge to hold your breath or bounce.

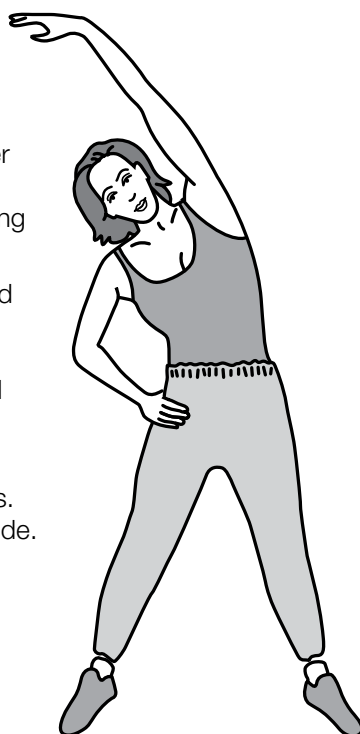
SIDE BENDS

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, keeping a slight bend in your legs.

Slowly reach one arm over your head and to the side until you feel a stretch along your side.

Keep your hips steady and your shoulders straight to the side. Avoid leaning forward or backward, and hold the stretch without bouncing.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds. Repeat on the opposite side.



TRICEPS MUSCLE STRETCH

Sit or stand tall with good posture.

Place one arm behind your head, with your hand facing toward your back and down your spine.

Use the other hand to push down gradually on the elbow joint, while slowly increasing the stretch on the triceps muscle.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds. Repeat on the opposite side.



SHOULDER STRETCH

This stretch can be completed while seated or standing.

Take one arm and reach across the front of your chest. Use the opposite hand to push the arm into your chest at a point just above the elbow joint.

Keep the arm straight and breathe comfortably.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds, and repeat with the other arm.

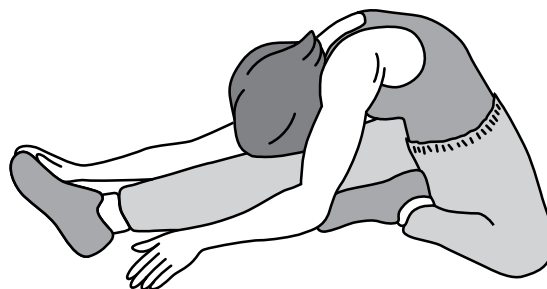


HURDLER STRETCH

Sit on the floor with your right leg straight out and your left leg folded inward with the bottom of your left foot touching the inside of your right thigh.

With your right hand, reach toward your right ankle until you feel the stretch in your calf and rear thigh muscles. Continue the stretch without bouncing.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds, and repeat with the left leg.



CHEST STRETCH

This stretch can be completed while seated or standing.

Place both hands on the back of your head.

Slowly pull your elbows toward the back of your head without extending your neck forward.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds.



LEG CURL STRETCH

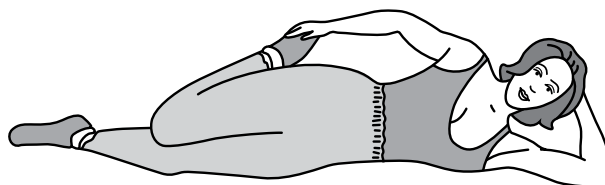
This stretch can be performed either standing or laying on your side. If standing, use a chair or wall for support.

Grab one leg at the ankle. Slowly pull your heel up toward your bottom, while gradually stretching the muscles at the front of your thigh.

If you cannot reach your ankle, wrap a towel around your ankle and pull on the towel until you feel a stretch in the muscles at the front of your thigh. This version should be done lying on your side.

Keep your knees together and back straight throughout the stretch.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds, and repeat with the opposite leg.



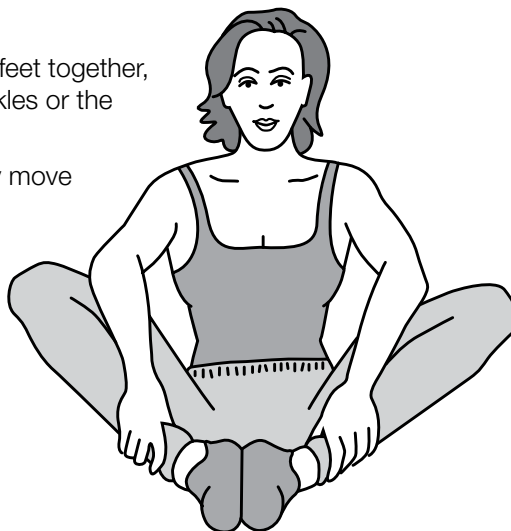
INNER THIGH STRETCH

Sitting on the floor with the soles of the feet together, place your hands either around your ankles or the lower part of your legs.

While keeping your back straight, gently move your knees toward the floor. Using your elbows, gradually apply pressure against the inner knee until you feel a steady stretch on your inner thigh muscles.

Avoid pulling up on your feet during the stretch.

Hold for 10 to 15 seconds.



CALF STRETCH

Standing with one foot in front of the other, place both feet about two feet apart.

Lean forward with the knee of your front leg over the ankle joint. Keep your rear leg and your back in a straight position.

Press the heel of your back leg into the floor until a stretch is felt in the calf muscle in the back of the lower leg.

If no stretch is felt, slide the heel slowly backwards while keeping both feet on the floor.

For improved stability and a greater stretch, push against a wall. Hold for 10 to 15 seconds, and repeat with the opposite leg.

